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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 007726

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CENTCOM AND EUCOM: PLEASE PASS TO POLADS AND J-5

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2012

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S ELECTIONS: OUR ANALYSIS AND PREDICTIONS

REF: ANKARA 7713

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch. Reason: 1.5(b)(d)

1. (C) Summary: The Islam-influenced AK (Justice and Development) of R. Tayyip Erdogan will be the clear winner in the Turkish national elections on Nov. 3, and has a strong shot at a Parliamentary majority. Deniz Baykal's Establishmentarian, left-of-center Republican Peoples' Party (CHP) will probably finish second, though the gap between it and the rest of the pack will be relatively small. How other major parties will fare -- and whether they make it over the 10% national vote threshold and into Parliament -- may well now be the critical factor for Turkey's immediate political future. End summary.

AK is Here

2. (C) AK will win big. The party's own poll numbers suggest that it will get at least 30 percent of the vote. In our view, such figures represent low-end, conservative estimates sustained over a considerable period of time. We are inclined to put AK in the mid-30s at least, with a legitimate shot at still more.

-- The remaining question is not whether AK will win a plurality of the vote, but by how much -- and whether its margin of victory will grant it a parliamentary majority, perhaps one sufficient (367 of 550 seats) to amend Turkey's Kemalist constitution. This is well within the realm of the possible.

-- Continuing last-ditch efforts by the Deep State to clip the party's wings and shave its vote tally could have an impact on the outcome -- with observers divided over whether such moves will generate a popular reaction that could actually enhance rather than limit AK's numbers. Recent ham-handed attempts by the State to undercut AK include: 1) Appeals Court and Election Board decisions to rule Erdogan ineligible to stand for elections; 2) the recent filing of a closure case against AK; 3) statements by President Sezer widely interpreted as hinting he might not grant the mandate to form a government to a victorious AK; and 4) last-minute legal proceedings raising the possibility of post-election annulment of AK votes on yet another technicality -- Erdogan's name is still listed on the ballot as Party Chairman.

-- Supporters of the Islamist Saadet Party and former P.M. Necmettin Erbakan, its de facto leader, are also sensing an AK victory and appear to be gravitating to Erdogan, which would keep Saadet on the sidelines after Nov. 3.

CHP Second by Default

3. (C) CHP will wind up a distant second, probably in the mid-teens though with an outside shot at 20 percent of the vote on election day. CHP is trying to portray itself as the Kemalist Establishment's champion and only viable alternative to AK. However, CHP has done little to capture the popular imagination, and indeed has alienated many centrist voters. Whereas AK support cuts across a broad swath of the socio-political pie, CHP's appeal is confined to left-of-center urban voters. Moreover, CHP has made numerous strategic and tactical errors that are costing it the chance to monopolize the roughly 30 percent of the vote that traditionally is apportioned to the left here. As Kemal Dervis -- whose candidacy for CHP is proving more controversial than the secularist Establishment had expected

-- confided to us this week, CHP is not making the progress it wanted. He also lamented once again his decision to abandon the New Turkey (YT) Party of Ismail Cem.

-- CHP local activists show none of the enthusiasm for Baykal and the party that is the rule on the AK side. A CHP activist in Zongludak, a Black Sea haven of the labor constituency, expressed concern that divisive Baykal would "bring the country down" if he becomes Prime Minister. A journalist at the Kemalist Cumhuriyet daily told us he would vote for Baykal, even though "I hate him."

-- CHP, moreover, has failed to monopolize the Aegean region, which was crucial to the victory of Bulent Ecevit's Democratic Left (DSP) in 1999.

-- Notably, Izzetin Dogan, one of the leading voices of an Alevi community that has traditionally backed the center-left and CHP, is signaling publicly that his co-religionists are not in any way indebted to CHP, nor should they feel compelled to vote for it.

Curtains for Current GOT Parties

14. (C) Despite Ecevit's full-court effort to stoke secularist and nationalist fears among an anxious electorate, his DSP looks set to finish below the 10% national vote threshold and out of Parliament -- though it could pull in sufficient votes to hurt CHP. Similarly D/P.M. Mesut Yilmaz' ANAP (Motherland) is playing its support for EU-related democratization for all its worth, and the party gets credit on the local level and for some of its regional candidates. Nevertheless, ANAP appears to need a miracle to overcome general public distrust of Yilmaz and reach the threshold. Voters also seem set to punish Deputy P.M. Devlet Bahceli's Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) by keeping it out of the next Parliament. MHP's militant grassroots see Bahceli as failing to deliver on his ultranationalist campaign promises. However, the MHP base has a reputation for blind loyalty and could return to the fold on election day.

Genc and the Rest

15. (C) The Genc (Youth) Parti of Motorola deadbeat Cem Uzan could well emerge as the surprise of the 2002 race. Some observers compare the rise of Genc to that of MHP, which came in from the political fringe to capture 18% of the vote in the 1999 elections. Genc and MHP share some of the same xenophobic and populist ideological convictions and compete for the same constituency -- MHP insiders admit to us privately that Genc is cutting into their support base. Nevertheless, there are some significant differences. Uzan has vast media and financial resources denied to MHP. On the other hand, MHP, unlike Genc, has a decades-long track record and is a known quantity among voters, attributes that made it a viable "protest" vehicle for disaffected voters in 1999. While some of our contacts dismiss Genc's chances to clear the 10% threshold, others insist it might attract up to 12-14% on election day -- which would threaten CHP's hold on second place.

-- Another potential surprise is the pro-Kurdish DEHAP (Democratic People's Party), which is within striking distance of the vote threshold. Like previous pro-Kurdish parties, DEHAP is set to dominate in the Kurdish southeast (with AK a possible second). Unlike its predecessors, DEHAP seems to have picked up support from migrant Kurds in the western cities, in central Anatolia, and even in the Black Sea region -- votes which in the past have gone to Erbakan and his Islamist parties.

-- The True Path Party (DYP) of Tansu Ciller is on the bubble but, according to various contacts, has gained ground among rural Anatolian voters in recent weeks and might well reach the threshold (reftel).

Comment: Get Ready

16. (C) The race for 10% is still not completely decided --

and so neither is the breakdown of the post-election Parliament, which could host as few as two and as many as six parties. The outcome will also have a major impact on how seats are apportioned, and thus, on the potential AK majority or on leaders' calculations as to possible coalition alternatives. The bottom line: whatever the ultimate arithmetical outcome, we should expect significant changes in Turkey.

PEARSON